

AD A104460 (6) LEVEL (2)

CROSS CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY FAMILIES OVERSEAS.

(9) Final Rep't.

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REPORT NO. 78-56

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Cross Cultural Adjustment of
Military Families Overseas*

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* Report No. 78-58, supported by the Naval Medical Research and Development Command, Department of the Navy, under research Work Unit ZF51524022-0006. The views presented in this paper are those of the authors. No endorsement by the Department of the Navy has been given or should be inferred.

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Introduction

In recent years, the armed forces have demonstrated an increasing interest in the families of military personnel. One important factor contributing to this interest in the military family is the growing proportion of married personnel. In the past, the large majority of personnel in the armed forces of the industrialized nations of the West were unmarried. In the new military however, 93 percent of career officers and 80 percent of career enlisted men in senior grades are married (Hill, 1976). A second reason for the accelerated interest in the family is a shift in the military organization. In the past, there existed a communal model of military organization in which the family was included as part of the military community. The service members' loyalties were not split between the family and the military. The increasing tendency to view the military as an occupation rather than a community has altered this picture, however. With this trend, the family has become increasingly separated from the military community and in the process has become a much greater influence on the behavior and career choices of the military member. In many cases, the family and the military are in direct competition for the individual's loyalty and commitment. Even when a balance or equilibrium has been achieved between the two systems, additional stresses on the family may again put the two systems in conflict. One such potential stress is overseas assignment which may place severe demands on both the military member and the family.

In 1974, 1,665 Navy enlisted personnel failed to complete their overseas tour of duty because of adjustment problems (Tucker, 1975). This was from a total of 27,505 Navy personnel detailed overseas in one year. Although an early return rate of 6 percent appears minor, a conservative estimate of the cost involved was \$6,154,000, or about \$3,700 per individual. This example is merely a rough indication of the problem, however. Neither officers nor the families of these men were included in the statistics given.

Equally important is the fact that early return to the continental United States often signifies a case of extreme personal or family stress. Further, it is reasonable to assume that many military families have adjustment problems which do not warrant early return but which produce significant stress in the family. These problems are often ignored if they are not highly visible and if they do not reflect poorly on the U.S. or the command.

The tendency to ignore such difficulties, however, appears to be giving way to a more realistic appraisal of the problem and its solutions. In a recent high level, Navy-wide, family awareness conference (November, 1978) an entire workshop was devoted to the Navy family overseas. At this same conference, the remarks of Vice Admiral Arentzen, the Surgeon General of the Navy, touched upon the necessity for screening families prior to overseas assignment. While these recent events represent an intensification of the explicit interest in military families overseas, they do not represent the "breaking of new ground."

The following report represents an extensive review of the literature regarding cross cultural adjustment difficulties germane to the military family overseas. Within this context, adjustment factors such as culture shock, language deficiency, relocation difficulties, social isolation, financial strain, special work requirements, child adjustment demands, and health problems are addressed. In addition, this report articulates a number of specific recommendations concerning screening, selection, and the general attenuation of overseas adjustment difficulties.

Cross Cultural Adjustment Difficulties

Much of the evidence concerning specific types of adjustment problems experienced by military families overseas is anecdotal or derived from surveys. It is useful, however, for outlining major areas of strain in the overseas environment. These adjustment problems and their precipitating factors will be discussed in terms of impacts on the family system as a whole and upon individual family members.

As the members of a typical military family arrive at the overseas duty station they may find themselves quite disoriented, especially when their expectations were based on the limited and possibly outdated information they received prior to departure. However, most unanticipated problems, taken alone, would not seriously affect the normal functioning of the family or the ability of the serviceman to perform his job. Moving to a new location, adapting to climatic changes, learning a new language, budgeting with limited finances or establishing new social contacts are all manageable problems by themselves. It is frequently the combination of several such

factors which taxes the coping resources of the military family overseas and precipitates serious adjustment problems. As Wallen (1967) states:

"... when ... (these) difficulties are added to those arising from not knowing how to communicate and the uncertainties presented by the strange customs, compounded by the problems and emotional fatigue of moving one's family and one's possessions thousands of miles, the emotional stresses and anxieties become understandable. Consequently, the individual's physical and emotional tolerances are lowered, making him susceptible to infection, physical illness, and emotional fatigue (p. 724).

Culture Shock

When military families encounter the new environment, the range of adjustment is wide -- some military families cope successfully with overseas living and express considerable satisfaction with the experience as a whole. Others are plagued by chronic health problems, alcoholism, strained marital and family relations, and adjustment difficulties with children. The extent of successful adjustment depends on both the coping resources of the family and the nature of the host country (i.e., whether the climate is extreme, the customs are considerably different, the families are isolated in the country, etc.). Yet, despite these differences in adjustment, the pattern is essentially the same.

While the new arrival displays positive attitudes toward the host country initially, this initial satisfaction is generally followed by disillusionment. If adaptation is successful, however, disillusionment is replaced by a more positive and realistic attitude (Barrett and Bass, 1976). This pattern typically follows the five specific stages of culture shock (Oberg, in Furukawa, 1977).

Phase one, the "honeymoon", can last from a few days to several months. The newcomer is caught up in the quaintness of the new culture, and is shielded from or insensitive to conflicts generated by his behavior. Examples of persons who may not advance beyond this honeymoon period are the tourist, the visiting consultant, and the roving dignitary who is housed in the plush hotel and carefully chauffeured to the exclusively modern or picturesque parts of the city.

Phase two, the "hostile" period, occurs when the individual realizes that familiar behavior cues do not work or take on completely different meanings.

Phase three is the "humor" period, in which the individual begins to laugh at his own ignorance of the host culture and attempts to gain more knowledge about the host country. In other words, he becomes a student of the other culture.

Phase four is often called the "helper" phase, since the individual has gained the knowledge and perspective to assist newcomers or fellow old-timers who are stuck in the hostile phase. In communicating this knowledge and experience, the individual strengthens his own acceptance of the differences and similarities between American attitudes and those of the host culture.

Phase five, is reached by very few persons. This phase is called the "habitat" phase and is based on the recognition and acceptance that what is right for foreigners may or may not be right for Americans.

These phases of culture shock are not unique to the military family. On the other hand the severity of the problems and the potential for fixation in the hostile phase may be exacerbated in military families because financial compensation is often not commensurate with the demands of the cultural change. Those military families experiencing adjustment problems usually become fixated in the hostile phase and are unable to see the positive aspects of the host country. As a result, they remain dissatisfied with living overseas. Furthermore, the serviceman who is fixated in the hostile phase and preoccupied with family adjustment problems may perform poorly in his job and transfer his dissatisfaction with the host country to a generalized dissatisfaction with his military career.

Language Deficiency

Perhaps the most unsettling feeling upon arrival in a foreign country results from a lack of language skills. More than anything, this deficiency prevents meaningful interactions with host country nationals and turns the most mundane daily activities such as shopping or chatting with neighbors into difficult and stressful events. As one Foreign Service wife put it, "Being unable to speak the language makes me more dependent on my husband, increases my fears of living in a new place, reduces my self-confidence and nourishes resentments" (Dorman, et al., 1977, p. 45). Furthermore, host nationals may not always be patient with Americans who have trouble speaking the language. Many feel that Americans who live in their country should at least try to communicate in the language of the host country. One Navy wife living in Spain, for example, wrote,

"Americans here are treated differentially depending upon their ability to speak Spanish. While all Americans are generally treated courteously, many shops in Rota ... have three prices: one for Americans who do not speak Spanish, one for those who do, and one for the Spanish people" (Weinberg, et al., 1971, p. 65). Many Americans see this differential treatment as an affront and feel that host nationals should make the effort to communicate. Another Navy wife in Greece wrote "(I) do not want to learn (the language); (I) feel that Greeks should make the effort" (p. 58). Still another wrote "I expected at least some of the people to speak English--very few do" (p. 60). Thus, differential expectations between the Americans and host nationals may have a synergistic effect and create negative stereotypes which are difficult to break.

The language problem has its roots in the U.S. prior to the overseas assignment of the military family. Language training is required only for high impact assignments where collaboration with host nationals is essential. An example of such an assignment is a military attache or military advisor. Otherwise, it is considered an extra preparatory activity which the serviceman may attend at his discretion. Moreover, in no case is language training considered absolutely essential for the wife. At best, she is encouraged to attend sessions on a space available basis assuming she can manage to find a sitter for the children and transportation to the classes.

Relocation Difficulties

Other adjustment problems incurred by the military family overseas

are of a logistical nature. These include the physical move itself, finding adequate housing, learning about the public transportation system, and learning how to shop for items on the host economy. While moving, in general, is a highly stressful event (McKain, 1973; Holmes and Rahe, 1967), moving abroad is even more stressful. Frequently, the shipment allowance permits few excess household effects that are not considered necessities (e.g., books, hobby equipment, records, etc.). These effects however, may be of considerable value to the family in the sense that they make one's overseas dwelling a home (Dorman, et al., 1977).

Of course, the overseas dwelling is an additional factor of primary concern and has proven to be a source of dissatisfaction with many military families. In a survey of Navy families overseas, Goldsamp (1972) found that the quality of housing was one of the best predictors of satisfaction with living overseas. More importantly, Braunstein (1971) reported that approximately half of the Navy wives questioned in his study found overseas housing to be worse than they had expected.

The quality of the housing appears to be determined primarily by its location on or off base and the officer/enlisted status of the serviceman. If the housing is located off base, it often demands a compromise in price and/or quality. Housing prices on the local economy are often inflated because the landlords feel that Americans can afford higher than average rents. Price glutting may also occur because of competition for limited housing among Americans. Military families not only feel dissatisfied with this situation but, understandably, resent being manipulated.

In addition to coping with problems of housing availability, military families must adapt to different standards of quality. This may mean learning to live with poor heating and plumbing, a lack of running hot water, inadequate wiring for appliances, and pests such as roaches, ants, and rats. On-base housing quality varies according to location but indications are that it is frequently less than satisfactory. A Navy wife in Japan wrote "Military housing in the Yokosuka area is very poor. Some of the worst Naval housing we have seen in our travels throughout the Navy" (Weinberg, et al., 1972, p. 34).

Despite these inconveniences most military families would be more than willing to take any available housing on base. Unfortunately, shortages are frequent and sometimes the wait for base housing is 18 months long (Weinberg, et al., 1972). In addition, enlisted men are often given lower housing priority than officers and find themselves forced to live off base in expensive housing.

Once the housing has been obtained, it is generally the wife who must begin organizing the household, and finding her way in the host country. These tasks may be especially trying for the wife who has a minimal grasp of the language and yet must carry out transactions with host nationals. Cleveland, Mangone, and Adams (1960) noted that while "the husband's shock is cushioned by the comfortable continuity of his (job) progression, ... the wife is the one who must transplant family life to new surroundings, build new friendships, adjust to dirt and heat in the home, worry about health and schools, get used to the

invasion of her privacy by omnipresent servants and try to learn a strange tongue in two or three distracted hours a week." The potential for marital strain increases when the husband fails to understand his spouse's frustrations with shopping in the host economy, dealing with servants, and initiating meaningful social contact with host nationals. His experiences probably lead him to view the host nationals quite differently. Within the work environment, his interactions with nationals are probably cordial and characterized by cooperation toward mutually desirable goals (Furukawa, 1977). The wife's experiences, on the other hand, may reinforce her tendency to withdraw from social contact in the host country. Her adjustment may be severely jeopardized under these conditions, especially if she lacks the conveniences of base housing, commissary and medical privileges, and the security of a supportive network of military friends and neighbors.

Social Isolation

The development of a supportive network of friends with host nationals is often difficult because of a difference in value systems. David and Elkind (1966) observed this phenomenon among Europeans: "For the American, the tendency is to accept someone as a friend until that person proves unworthy of friendship. For the European it is just the reverse: a person must prove his worth before he can be accepted as a friend ..." (p. 95). Social isolation may be more pronounced in areas where customs and values are even more different than in Europe (e.g., Asia, the Middle

East). In these countries, overcoming differences in customs and values may be all but impossible. Additional strains are encountered in countries in which the populace holds negative attitudes toward Americans. In such countries the American serviceman and his family often feel like members of a threatened minority.

Even if the social or political environment is not hostile, women in some cultures do not enjoy the same opportunities, privileges, or independence as they do in the U.S. Thus, American women may be treated poorly in the host country. This treatment further reinforces the women's tendency to isolate themselves.

Another factor which tends to foster social isolation is that the newcomer often views the host culture as a source of irritation rather than a source of unique learning opportunities. The following vignette (Bower, 1967), was drawn from an actual case and illustrates this situation well:

First Sergeant and Mrs. R. and their two children had lived on the base in France for close to two years. During that time they had seen about 250 American movies, played bingo on base about 80 times, played bridge with other Air Force families 200 times, read over 200 paperback novels and about 700 issues of the Stars and Stripes. They had been to Paris once and attended the festival at Orleans once. They had not set foot in a French home, talked with a Frenchman, visited a Chateau or a wine festival. They were happy to be getting back to the States where they could attend American movies, play bingo, bridge, and read their own hometown newspaper. They were especially happy to go home because their children were unhappy, did not do well in school, had few friends, and were also anxious to get back (p. 789).

Withdrawal into the American enclave is unfortunate because overseas adjustment is often related to the satisfaction one derives from contacts

with host nationals. In examining predictors of satisfaction with overseas living, Goldsamt (1972) found treatment by host country nationals to be one of the most important. It is reasonable to assume that host nationals would be most likely to be supportive when the American demonstrates an awareness of the cultural norms (Brein and David, 1971) and has an interest in maintaining contact with the host nationals (Benson, 1978).

Financial Strains

Financial hardship is another strain which pervades many aspects of life overseas and impacts upon the social and emotional adjustment of the military family. Presently, the devaluation of the dollar is creating problems for many military families overseas. Hardest hit are enlisted families forced to live on the economy because of housing shortages. Without careful budgeting, these families continually risk financial overextension. Moreover, the financial help provided by other family members in times of need cannot be relied upon overseas. Consequently, the strain of living over one's means is increased because of a lack of normal social and financial supports. This problem is particularly acute in the normally dual income family who faces a severe reduction in income because of a lack of employment opportunities for the spouse overseas. Even when jobs are available, several obstacles must be overcome in order for the spouse to begin working. Sometimes foreign laws prohibit or discourage non-nationals competing with locals for jobs

in the economy. Often, the spouse is not fluent enough in the language to be employed. A third problem centers around the logistical problems involved in working--obtaining transportation to and from work, and finding someone to take care of children.

Children

Children, like their parents, must adapt to the new overseas environment often with the additional complications of school adjustment, lack of recreational activities, and little time spent with parents.

Dependent's schooling is a major problem for overseas military families. In Weinberg's (1971) interviews with homeported Navy families, parents voiced criticisms of the quality of DoD schools, both in terms of the relevancy of the curriculum and the competence of the teachers. This concern is shared by most military or civilian Americans overseas with school age dependents. Some of the major inadequacies reported are: "lack of libraries and laboratory equipment, antiquated textbooks, limited or inconsistent curriculum, unqualified teachers, inadequate college counseling, and no special attention to learning disabilities and emotional problems" (Dorman, et al., 1977, p. 12). There are some indications that the quality of teaching and the motivation of the teachers is quite good and that many teachers in dependent schools are creative and resourceful. The teachers' major handicap is a lack of current materials and a "loss of contact with the professional mainstream and frontiers. They

would like more opportunities for inservice growth experiences led by the best professionals available" (Bower, 1967, p. 792).

In more remote areas, children may have to attend local schools and/or be sent to private schools. In the former case, the child may encounter difficulties with language barriers and curriculum differences. In the latter, the cost is often considerable and outside the budget of most military families. Another concern arises when the dependent ultimately seeks admission to college and finds that he is deficient in certain academic areas as a result of these early experiences. An additional difficulty with host country schools lies in the different standards of discipline. In many European schools discipline is stressed and may create problems in dealing with American children who by European standards seem undisciplined and poorly reared (David and Elking, 1977).

A serious shortcoming of dependent schools is the lack of trained personnel and resources to handle learning and behavior problems. Although admittedly outdated, Bower's (1966) estimates provide a glimpse of the problem: "For an American population of 415,000, half of whom are children and dependents, there are about 31 Army, 8 Air Force, and 2 or 3 Navy psychiatrists; about 5 Army and 3 Air Force psychologists; and 14 Army and 3 Air Force social workers" (p. 793). One result of this shortage is that the dispensary physician receives the bulk of these behavior and learning cases as well as other problems of a social/emotional nature which affect the child or family. The implications for dealing with this problem seem clear. Unless the number of mental health

workers overseas is increased by a substantial amount, a more thorough pre-departure screening of children with learning disabilities and emotional problems must be implemented.

In addition to the difficulties associated with schooling, children of military families encounter other adjustment problems overseas. One major problem is the lack of adequate recreational activities and facilities. In some locations, apartment stairwells become the primary play areas. Bower (1967) discusses the "Stairwell Syndrome":

"In many European countries where the climate is somewhat wet and cold for longer periods of time than in the United States, (the stairwell) is the only play area with any potential scope and utility for children ... Not uncommonly the closeness of the living quarters, the above-average number of children in below-average space, can provide enough friction and heat in at least one or two families to spark an explosion of the entire stairwell." (p. 791).

Remote, sparsely populated locations, on the other hand, may isolate children from social contact with peers and hinder their social development. This isolation, of course, increases their dependence on parents. Further, older children who have lived abroad for some time must deal with identity problems. As Dormai et al. (1977) noted, "Many parents observed that when children spend most of their formative years abroad they are superficially at home in all cultures, but not truly a part of any - including their own" (p. 11). This phenomenon has implications for the reintegration of these children into CONUS. The culture shock experienced upon return may be just as great as that incurred when the dependent was first exposed to the host country.

Kuten (cited in Bower, 1967) describes another adjustment problem which children and their families may experience as a result of transiency:

(Transiency quite often results in) a loss or reduction of a sense of stable time and space with eventual impact on the self-concept of the individual. Living experiences which are fashioned out of a series of transiencies or expectations of such transiencies can produce a reality and self which is segmented, discontinuous, and uninvolved. Such self-concepts undoubtedly lead to perceptions of communities as ephemeral stopovers on the way to the next station. Why be overly concerned about the crumbling walls, the unfixed walks, the burned-out bulbs, petty vandalism, or lack of services in a home or community from which one may move next week, next month, or next year? (p. 791).

Perhaps the highest risks for adjustment problems are adolescents. The overseas environment frequently exacerbates the normal stresses associated with this life stage. Typical crises of identity, involvement, and loyalty may be exaggerated enough to precipitate a host of problems ranging from criminal actions to drug and alcohol abuse.

Finally, adjustment problems of children may be expressions of pathology in the family. Poor family relations, for example, often become manifest in the child's learning or behavior problems at school. This usually puts pressure back on the family to deal with the problem, especially in situations where few services (e.g., counselors, social workers, psychologists, etc.) are available to provide help. In addition, many children realize that misbehavior could jeopardize their father's career and cause a reassignment. They sometimes use this situation to meet their needs at their parent's expense. Even if their problems are not used for blackmail, they may be severe enough to pre-occupy the family and detract from the serviceman's job performance.

Special Work Requirements.

Overseas assignments which require considerable social contact with host nationals represent an area in which cross cultural adjustment problems may be of particular significance. The military assistance officer for example works closely with foreign military officers on a wide range of areas. He may provide leadership training, technical information on military hardware, or principles of military strategy. In any case, the overriding determination of his success lies in his ability to communicate effectively across cultural lines. (cf. Froelich and Klores, 1965; Hoehn, 1966, 1968; Froelich, 1968; Graham, 1969).

Foreign Service duty is another area in which cross-cultural contact is mandatory for a high level of both job satisfaction and performance. Although the Foreign Service officer is well-suited to the overseas environment, he is not immune to adjustment problems. The following excerpt is illustrative. "... The fact that the Foreign Service functions at all allows some room for thought that perhaps there exists a special breed with uncanny talents for social adjustment. Whatever accounts for those who function well, I surmise they represent the extreme end of the bell scale, and wives and children do not necessarily fall into the same category." (Dane, 1974).

A third type of job requiring considerable contact with host nationals is that of the military attache. These individuals must master their technical specialties and demonstrate a high level of language ability and cultural sensitivity. It is becoming apparent that the ability of

these men to establish contacts, build trust, and further cooperation with host nationals is a critically important factor in their success. This point is discussed in an excerpt from a letter written by a returned attache.

"It is my belief that in the future our people will demand that our civilian and military leaders demonstrate greater capability, sensitivity and judgment in our affairs abroad. For the military man, this means that mastery of a professional military skill will not be enough. In addition, proficiency in diplomacy, negotiation, and a consideration for the rights of others must receive increasing attention. The professional military man must have the ability to apply these skills with knowledge and good judgment to further our national aims -- often against a backdrop of foreign mores, self-interests, and occasional distrust and prejudice."

Families of servicemen in high impact jobs are particularly susceptible to increased pressures overseas. Whereas the typical service-man's wife may keep a low profile overseas, wives of attaches and other high level personnel are required to perform social functions associated with diplomatic roles. This means she must first be well adjusted in the host culture and secondly, be willing to take a very active role in supporting her husband's career.

In addition to the increased stress incurred through this role of active support, these women are often more isolated than other military women living on base. Consequently, they experience a somewhat more limited access to "safety valves" such as chaplains and social workers

. Hochschild provides a good discussion of the social and representational obligations of the ambassador's wife and how this impacts upon her adjustment (Hochschild, 1969).

The issue, then, is whether the wife is willing to fill this role or whether she wants more freedom to pursue her own personal or career goals. Because of the change in women's status (more individualism, career aspirations, educational pursuits, etc.) the conflict is intensified. Overseas, the wife of the Foreign Service officer (or diplomat or attache) finds that "Legal restrictions, cultural constraints, and diplomatic traditions very often continue to place her in a dependent position" (Dorman, et al., 1977, p. 22). This situation should be made explicit before the family is assigned overseas because it is not an easy one for the wife to change. Rather, she must adjust to it. Dorman et al's (1977) observations on the Foreign Service spouse are pertinent:

"Spouses ... must recognize the representative (not representational) nature of their life overseas, regardless of whether they are paid employees of the foreign affairs agencies. Other people, host country nationals, third country nationals including other diplomatic, and even other Americans, continue to regard the Foreign Service spouses as official Americans. Her activities are not seen as private actions but more likely as extensions of the Embassy. Whether they like it or not, whether they seek such status or not, all wives are representatives of the Embassy as well as of themselves and their country." (p. 23)

Health Problems

Although problems of a social/emotional nature constitute a pronounced adjustment difficulty for families overseas, these effects are generally less deleterious than the problems of an organic or physiological nature. In fact, the social/emotional problems often become manifest in physiological dysfunction to produce devastating effects on the overseas military family (Holmes and Rahe, 1967). Thus, a good deal of the precious medical resources overseas are probably used by families

suffering from stress-related illness (Bower, 1967). As Wallen (1967) states, "Culture shock acts in many instances as a stimulus or vehicle to ... numerous hypochondriacal concerns. It also precipitates excessive sick-call visits to dispensaries and to family clinics, and may result in psychiatric referral, psychiatric hospitalization, and abrupt or early cancellation of the military member's overseas tour" (p. 724). Dorman et al (1977) suggest as a solution the use of a paraprofessional who, "working in conjunction with the Medical Division - might be able to help those patients whose medical problems are stress related, thus easing the doctor's burden and aiding post morale" (p. 15). In addition to the risks of stress-related illness, the general health risks of foreign environments are considerable. Wallen (1967) touches on a few of these difficulties: "A person may suffer from the change of climate, skin irritations and intestinal disturbances. Strange foods and various tropical parasites can upset him. Local standards of health may be different. ... Toilet facilities and plumbing might be primitive and unsanitary" (p. 724). Thus, it is crucial to inform military families of the particular health hazards prior to arrival at their specific overseas duty station.

Health Care Services. It would also be of help to provide military families with predeparture information on the availability of health care services in different locations. Unfortunately, shortages in medical equipment and personnel are usually the rule rather than the exception

overseas. Weinberg's (1971) interviews with Navy families homeported overseas underscore this point. Families expressed criticisms of dispensaries which were focused on problems of "understaffing, doctor's attitudes, limited attention, the wait involved, and the insufficient stock of medical supplies" (p. 32). A scarcity of medical facilities can make even minor illnesses a serious concern. Individuals requiring special medications and treatment will surely fail to adjust if sent to countries lacking adequate facilities. This unfortunate circumstance can and does occur, especially with the wife and children of the servicemen.

Sometimes the use of host country medical facilities is an alternative to pursue. However, families are usually reluctant to do this for a couple of reasons. The language barrier is a primary obstacle to overcome and may prevent accurate understanding of the illness and hamper diagnosis and treatment. Secondly, the quality of medical care is of concern for many families considering this alternative.

It is widely recognized that problems of daily living are the most prevalent of any encountered overseas (Bower, 1967; Dorman, et al., 1977; David and Elkind, 1966). The services to handle these problems, however, are even more lacking than medical services. David and Elkind (1966) note that ... "The major gap in professional services for the American family lies in the area of mental health ... Considering the stresses to which American families overseas are subject, the absence of adequate

mental health facilities constitutes a serious lack" (p. 97-98). The lack of adequate mental health services will cause an overload of the dispensaries and limit their effectiveness. Since many physicians are not trained to handle problems of the "worried well," the gap between needs and services cannot be easily bridged. Moreover, the ability of families to get prompt service for actual medical problems is also seriously limited.

Screening. One of the main factors contributing to the health problems of military families overseas is improper medical and psychiatric screening. Although the military attempts to screen out personnel with histories of medical or psychiatric problems, the present procedure is not totally adequate. At this point, a discussion of the screening procedures for overseas assignment may be useful.

Military screening for overseas assignment is used for two purposes: a) to ensure that those unqualified or high risk individuals are not sent abroad, and b) to match individuals with the proper training, skills, and background with the particular jobs available. The sheer number of individuals processed through this assignment or detailor system requires the use of the efficient and cost-effective methods.

The Army and Air Force rely on computerized screening systems. The Navy, on the other hand, relies upon manpower in the Bureau of Personnel to perform this function. After processing occurs at BuPers, individual commanding officers review the suitability of the individual for overseas assignment. Regardless of the particular technique utilized,

however, when overseas openings arise in any of the three services, people who are eligible and technically qualified are matched with the job and selected for the position. In this process, the serviceman's personnel jacket is the primary source of information upon which suitability decisions are based. In addition, a brief interview with the individual's commanding officer may take place. The Army and Air Force may use the following criteria in screening personnel.

1. Nationality--person must be an American citizen
2. Dependents and no spouse
3. A sole surviving son will not be sent overseas in a combat situation
4. Certain physical constraints
5. Married to another service member, whose present location does not allow for overseas assignment
6. Certain security restrictions.
7. Compassionate reasons

The Navy has incorporated into its system a report on the suitability for overseas assignments. Their criteria for screening includes the following:

1. Previous reassignment due to unsuitability
2. Prior conviction for civilian or military criminal offenses
3. Medical, dental, or mental problems requiring special treatment
4. Financial instability
5. Public record of intoxication, drug abuse, fighting, racial bias, or marital conflict

6. Dependents requiring special educational facilities not normally available overseas

Screening for officers and enlisted personnel is essentially the same except that more individual screening is conducted with officers.

Screening, however, is considerably different for high impact jobs such as military attaché and military assistance advisors. Personalized interviews are conducted, motivation for the assignment is examined, and security clearances are obtained. These individuals must be given additional language training and comprehensive information on the country to which they will be sent. The screening procedures for high impact jobs differ somewhat between the services. For example, in the screening of Air Force attaches, the Air Force uses a panel of interviewers who have had experience in the particular country for which the individual is being considered. They also include the wife in the interview. An overview of the differential tri-service screening procedures for military attaches is presented in the proceedings of the conference on selection of military attaches, May, 1977.

The primary deficiencies in screening procedures seem to lie in two areas. First of all, wives and children are not normally included in the screening process. Secondly, screening responsibility rests with the detaching command and inconsistencies in the thoroughness of screening are frequent. An example of the consequences of poor screening may be illustrative. An American hospital serving military and civilian personnel in Iran conducted an in-house survey of patients

seen during the previous year. To quote:

"Among our mental health cases, we found that over 50 percent had been under psychosocial treatment in the past ten years and that most of our psychiatric patients had been hospitalized for emotional problems during the past five years. In one case, a dependent wife of a DoD civilian had been discharged from a psychiatric ward so that she could board the airplane for Iran (Furukawa, 1977, p. 13).

In some cases, misleading or inaccurate information is given during screening and may not be discovered unless the problems are listed in the applicant's medical records. The serviceman may not realize the importance of comprehensive information on medical and psychiatric problems for accurate screening. Some problems are of so little consequence to him that he probably sees no point in reporting them. If the serviceman realizes the importance of the overseas assignment for his career progression, his motivation for passing the screening process is increased. Should a member of his family show a history of medical, psychiatric, or social problems, he may feel reluctant to disclose this information and risk being sent overseas without the family member.

Selection. It may well be that tightening up the normal screening procedures would result in a cost-effective method of reducing overseas adjustment problems. However, in some situations, the cost of overseas adjustment failures is very great, and, therefore, the use of well developed selection instruments may have considerable payoff. Although the military does not use selection instruments for predicting overseas adjustment at present, this area might be fruitful to explore for those jobs in which successful performance is of paramount importance (e.g.,

military attaches, advisors).

The development of selection instruments entails thorough processes of determining, through systematic data collection, the skills, traits, and knowledge necessary for effective job performance. Once these criteria are developed, the focus is shifted to predictors, i.e., what information (behavioral, cognitive, attitudinal) can best predict future job performance. The strength of the statistical relationship between the predictors and the criteria is equated with the validity of the selection instrument.

The development of selection instruments for cross-cultural use, however, is a complex endeavor. It should be remembered that even the best selection methods used in domestic industry are not extremely accurate. Considering the complexity and multidimensionality of the overseas adjustment problem, the selection task is formidable. These adjustment dimensions, while shown to be important, are surely more difficult to quantify for selection purposes than are job skills.

An exhaustive review of the literature pertaining to screening and selection for overseas assignment was conducted by the Center for Research and Education (Tucker, 1975).⁴ It referenced 245 works, of which 59 were annotated, describing the populations, predictors, criterion measures, and results of the particular studies. An examination of these findings provide the best direction for the development of a valid and useful selection instrument for overseas assignment. The CRE report also outlines common theoretical and methodological problems encountered in

attempting empirical work in this area. Some of the major findings from this body of literature which addresses overseas selection strategies are addressed below.

The primary weakness in all relevant studies is the lack of a common definition of adjustment or adaptation to a foreign culture, and the use of valid measures of this concept as the basis for prediction or selection. Resolution of the criterion problem is perhaps the most important, yet difficult, step in this process. Cross-cultural literature seems to contain intriguing theories of adjustment which are difficult to operationalize as criterion measures. Conversely, if a purely empirical approach is employed (as was the case with much Peace Corps research, for example) much data is gathered which cannot be readily integrated into existing theoretical work. As a result, criteria which work for one population in one culture may not generalize to another. Also of concern is the fact that a majority of criterion measures used in this research are suspect. For example, the criterion of not returning early to the U.S. does not address the large range of "successful" adjustment to a foreign culture. Nor is the use of ratings at the end of training but before overseas departure an adequate criterion of overseas performance. This pre-departure criterion, however, was used in many Peace Corps studies. Benson (1978) provides an excellent discussion of the unresolved issues in criteria development. They are illustrative of the complex nature of criteria for overseas effectiveness and deserve mention here:

1. To what extent is adjustment location specific?

2. How generalizable are criterion measures from one subject population to another?
3. To what extent is measurement of overseas adjustment confounded with other variables (e.g., job performance and/or adjustment in general)?
4. Are criteria of overseas adjustment stable over time, or do they vary if they are collected at different time periods after immersion in the foreign culture?
5. Is the adjustment process the same for a family as for an individual, i.e., to what extent does marital status alter the nature of overseas adjustment?

It is apparent that most of the extant cross-cultural literature does not use criterion measures which adequately address the complexity of overseas adjustment. Another finding of the CRE report was that none of the materials reviewed described fully operational selection programs based on proven criteria of overseas success. In other words, even in cases where predictors were demonstrated to show a statistical relationship with criteria measures, these results were not integrated into existing selection programs to assess the utility of the predictors for selection decisions.

In addition, the prediction of overseas adaptability was found to be difficult and often yielded dismal results. This especially typified personality tests and interview ratings as well as the total person approach (e.g., a psychological profile of the candidate for an overseas

job which considers background, interview, and personality data in combination). The majority of predictor studies reported correlations of about .40. Even more troublesome is the fact that these were not cross-validated, hence limiting the generalizations one can make from the findings.

In conclusion, Tucker (197⁴) underscores the need to focus attention on variables that are known to be of critical importance in the field in order to find useful criterion measures. The method he and other investigators propose is to a) identify successful and unsuccessful performers in the field, b) determine characteristics which could serve as predictors (behavioral, attitudinal, cognitive), and c) determine significant differences between groups to develop criterion targets. Also, predictors which have some discriminative value should be cross-validated on a new sample.

One study by Yellen and Mumford (1975) is a good example of this method. These investigators studied the adjustment of 249 Naval personnel in Japan. They developed a self-report criterion instrument, the Naval Overseas Adjustment Scale (NOAS), which tapped 10 dimensions of adaptation to a foreign culture. In addition, they obtained peer nominations and a self-report measure of satisfaction with being in Japan. These latter two measures were used to identify adjusted and non-adjusted individuals. Using this classification, the NOAS was found to significantly discriminate between these two groups. The 10 dimensions of adjustment are as follows: language ability, initiative,

mobility, cross-cultural friendliness, readiness for new experiences, culinary adaptability, acceptance, appreciation of customs, equanimity in the face of criticism, and cultural understanding. Yellen and Mumford further developed a pool of background, interest, and attitude items to use as predictors of adjustment. They were able to demonstrate its ability to identify a majority of unsuccessful adjusters. Moreover, the items which best discriminated between successful and unsuccessful adjusters were found to be attitude items. It may well be that one's expectations concerning the overseas assignment are as predictive of adjustment as one's past job performance. In summary, this study addressed the criterion problem well and provided a selection instrument, the Cross Cultural Interaction Inventory (CCII), which could significantly improve selection accuracy as well as be incorporated easily into existing screening and selection procedures. Unfortunately, as with most selection instruments, the CCII has not been validated on a new sample of personnel prior to assignment overseas. This is a mandatory step in the development and validation of any predictive device.

A preferred method for the development of a selection instrument for overseas assignments involves the use of the behavioral expectation rating scale (Campbell, et al., 1973). The development of this instrument will be outlined briefly. This approach requires the participation of the job holders in listing specific behaviors related to effective and ineffective job performance (i.e., the critical incidents technique). Incidents are then grouped into dimensions of performance which, in the

overseas setting, may range from report writing skills to the quality of interactions with host nationals. Finally, the job holders recategorize the incidents into specific dimensions and rate the degree to which each particular behavioral incident represents effective or ineffective job performance.

This method of criterion development has several advantages. First, it actively involves the individuals whose jobs are being rated. Their knowledge of good and poor performance is important here. Secondly, the emphasis is on job behaviors, not personality traits, and is thus easier to operationalize. Third, the language used to describe dimensions of performance is "organizationally correct," i.e., the job holders are the ones who have described performance and have presumably done so in familiar terminology. This is important because when the instrument is used operationally it is easier for the rater to understand the dimensions of performance. Most important, a behaviorally based rating scale, by definition, focuses on performance variables that are of critical importance in the field, thus satisfying one of the primary requirements for a good criterion instrument. Once developed, the rating scale would be used to obtain measures on a sample of people working in the field.

The next step involves the development of predictors of these performance ratings. These predictors may include demographic, past performance, personality, attitudinal, and family factors thought to be important influencers of performance and adjustment overseas. Predictor instruments would then be administered to the field sample and

would be assessed in terms of their ability to discriminate between different levels of performance as rated by the criterion instrument. The last stages of this process are the cross-validation of the instrument on a new sample and finally, the incorporation of the predictors into ongoing screening and selection systems. Of course, once in use, any selection instrument should be assessed on a continual basis to ensure its validity and practical utility.

Conclusions

We have reviewed the literature on cross cultural adjustment difficulties germane to the military family overseas because it is an area of substantial importance for both the military organization and the families of military personnel serving abroad. In our review, we found this area of scientific endeavor to be relatively diffuse and lacking in both conceptual and empirical rigor. However, given the generally un-systematic and anecdotal nature of the literature surveyed, two significant conclusions emerge. The first conclusion is that adjustment to a cross cultural environment is generally demanding and the personal and financial cost of failure is high. The second conclusion is that administrative initiatives should be invoked to improve screening, orientation, and in-country supports.

When a military member is assigned overseas, he and his family must adjust to both the traditional stresses involved in relocation and the unique stresses imposed by the new culture. Often times, traditional stresses such as the logistics of moving, the feelings of transiency, the selection of a dwelling, the establishment of social networks, and

the demands of the children are exacerbated when the family relocates in a foreign culture. Adjustment to these stresses, of course, must take place in a cultural milieu which often requires adjustment to culture specific stresses such as language deficiencies, health problems, culture shock, educational standards and facilities, climate, and customs. The family's response to these formidable adjustment demands is largely dependent upon their suitability for overseas assignment, their expectations, and the supports available in the host culture.

Since adjustment to a foreign culture is demanding and the cost of failure is high, the military should pursue administrative initiatives a) to collect a sound information base for overseas policy recommendations, b) to develop screening/selection procedures which take cognizance of the entire family, c) to improve existing orientation programs to provide realistic expectations and to ensure an efficient transfer with a minimum of anxiety, and d) to strengthen command accountability for overseas people programs. These initiatives, in conjunction with a systematic program of information collection and program evaluation, would provide a meaningful first step toward addressing the complex and difficult issue of cross cultural adjustment in the military.

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UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER 78-58	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. AD-A104 460	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Cross Cultural Adjustment of Military Families Overseas	5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Final	
7. AUTHOR(s) D. Stephen Nice Arne I. Beck	6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Health Research Center P.O. Box 85122 San Diego, CA 92138-9174	10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS 62758N F51524 ZF51524022- 0006	
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Naval Medical Research & Development Command Bethesda, MD 20014	12. REPORT DATE 21 Dec 1978	
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office) Bureau of Medicine & Surgery Department of the Navy Washington, DC 20372	13. NUMBER OF PAGES	
15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) UNCLASSIFIED		
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Family Cross cultural adjustment Selection		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The military family represents an important factor in the success of the serviceman assigned overseas. This review of the cross cultural literature addresses a number of issues, critical to the adjustment of military families overseas. Many of these issues involve strains related to culture shock, language deficiency, relocation, financial difficulties, social isolation, and health problems. A number of recommendations regarding screening, selection, and the general attenuation of overseas adjustment difficulties are articulated.		